

Note by LMB: This was an e-mail interview done by Jérôme Vincent in October 2009 for the French website ActuSF, where it appeared both in English and in French translation.

<http://www.actusf.com/spip/article-8511.html>

JV: How is born Barrayar and Miles Vorkosigan ?

LMB: Barrayar the planet began to be developed in Chapter One of my very first novel, *Shards of Honor* (which I wrote in 1982-1983, first published in '86), with the character of Aral Vorkosigan. The man appeared first; I made up his world around him gradually, as the story progressed. Miles first popped into my mind in prospect back when I was writing that first tale, when I decided that Aral and Cordelia would have a physically handicapped son in their very patriarchal, militarist world. It was almost the first thing I knew about Miles, before I even knew his name—that he would be both stunted and bright.

The first scene I saw in my head from *The Warrior's Apprentice*, the book where Miles got his real start, was actually the death of Sergeant Bothari (an ambiguous man who'd begun as a minor character in the first book, who refused to stay minor) envisioned as happening on some shuttleport tarmac far from home, protecting Miles. By the time I wrote my way back to that seed-crystal scene in the second novel, much had changed along the way.

The book which now falls second in the internal series chronology, *Barrayar*, was actually partially written back then and partially later. *Shards* being my first novel, I had rather overshot the ending, and ended up cutting off about six or eight chapters to find the present book's closure. (I had originally stopped shortly after the soltoxin attack scene.) These discarded pages went up to my attic as one lone carbon copy (this was written in the days before I had a home computer, on my old college typewriter). Later, stumbling across the copy by chance, I finally saw how the story should go on, so wrote a new opening chapter, revised what I had in hand, and continued. This would have been about 1990, making *Barrayar* my seventh book (as well as, partly, my first).

JV: How do you see him? And what relations do you have with this character today?

LMB: Miles has changed and grown over time, as I have. If you don't count his prenatal adventures in *Barrayar*, plus that little glimpse of him as a hyperactive child of five in the epilogue, he started with his own book at age seventeen. In the new book I just completed for Baen, *CryoBurn* (more on that below), he is thirty-nine, and living a life neither he nor I could have envisioned back in 1984 when I first wrote him. So he's aged twenty-two years during the time I've aged twenty-five years. We seem to be keeping pretty close pace.

Speaking of aging, the author's photo that J'ai Lu ran on the backs of my books for years and years was taken when I was thirty-five. I turn sixty this year. They really need to update that image...

JV: What can we expect about the evolution of your main characters?

LMB: Well, I don't know. I make this stuff up as I go along.

Also, this question presupposes that I will continue to do series work that follows a select group of characters chronologically, like the Vorkosiverse (mostly). But the Chalion series, for example, is structured thematically with one book for each of the five gods and therefore could jump over a whole range of time and characters, a potential I'd like to use if I ever write in that world again. The Sharing Knife world could move in a lot of different directions, too. Or I could write a stand-alone book, or start a new series. So even I have no idea what to expect next.

Looking into the nearer future, however, I have just finished (in June 2009) a new Miles Vorkosigan novel, titled *CryoBurn*. It will be published and e-published in the States by Baen Books in November 2010. (Also in Russia by my long-time publisher AST, and we just had an offer from Blackstone Audiobooks for an audiobook version.) I would guess there will be a French translation in due course.

In this book, Miles is thirty-nine years old, and on an Imperial Auditor investigation at Gregor's orders to a world we haven't seen before, Kibou-daini. The story alternates among three point-of-view characters: Miles, Armsman Roic, and a local boy named Jin Sato. The general mode is mystery, with cryonics and chicanery. And Miles isn't the only one bringing the chicanery.

JV: Have you been contacted by Hollywood or others for an adaptation? Is it a wish ?

LMB: Way back in the late 1980s, I actually sold TV rights to my short story "Barter" to *Tales From The Darkside*, which was a short-lived anthology program. They did produce and air the episode, but it had

little relation to my story by the time they were done with it. I also, in the mid-1990s, optioned *The Warrior's Apprentice* for feature film; fortunately, it never went beyond a (dire) script, which bore no relation at all to the original book. However, the option money did pay for my move to Minneapolis, for which I was grateful.

The film script was so bad, it drained away a lot of my naïve enthusiasm for the idea of a film being made of my work. So I can't say it's a wish, but if a new offer were to come along, I'd probably take the money and close my eyes tightly to the results.

In other media adaptations, your own Soliel comics company is doing a graphic novel interpretation of *The Warrior's Apprentice*. I've just seen the first two installments that ran in *Lanfeust* this summer; I understand the first of the three planned volumes of the graphic novel should be published very soon. I am looking forward to it. I cannot judge the dialogue, but it seems to follow my story closely, and the pictures are quite fun. They seem *drawn* with a French accent, somehow. The interpretation of Miles is quite good, and I especially like the version of Ivan. The artist, Jose Beroy, seems to draw very expressive characters, a quality which will be needed as the tale winds on.

<http://www.lekiosque.fr/Lanfeust-Magazine-numero-121-Vorkosigan-en-BD-online-l236557.aspx>

linked to an on-line sample, when last I looked.

JV: In French, we can read *The Sharing Knife*. How is born this series?

LMB: I should say in passing, I really like the French covers for this series, from Bragelonne. Very elegant.

I got the initial idea out on my back deck, on a fine summer day in June of 2004. I had lately sent the submission draft of *The Hallowed Hunt* off to my editor at Eos, and was enjoying a sort of blank space while waiting for revision requests to come back on the tide, and so was officially off-duty for writing. I had been feeling especially dead-brained, as I tend to after finishing a novel, when the idea of even looking at more prose, let alone writing any, makes me faintly nauseated. But it was a beautiful sunny warm day in Minnesota, which is not a gift to be wasted, so I went outside to soak up the sun.

Anyway, I started thinking up a tale to entertain just myself. And, rather to my own surprise, my imagination started working again, spinning out this unlikely romance. This first version had little resemblance to the final, although Dag was even then a one-handed older soldier, and Fawn was a young, short, and troubled runaway. Their world and the sharing knives were not even a gleam in my eye

yet. And a couple of happy hours went by, I absorbed my dose of needed sunlight (I don't think I have seasonal affective disorder, but I do like my light), and that was that.

As is not unusual, I found myself explaining the tale to my friend Pat as we went off to dinner, and all the reasons I couldn't make it a real novel, even though I'd enjoyed it immensely. I mean, writers are supposed to enjoy their work, but surely not this much? And she said—shortened considerably—"Of course you could."

There followed about two months of intense world-building around my characters and their plot. A lot of fantasy and SF writers start with their world, and then make up their characters and story so as to explore it; I more typically assemble it all in reverse, as we saw above in *Shards of Honor* and all the books that followed from it. My worlds are created as the characters and story move through them, and don't pre-exist in huge detail. (The plot is often very malleable as well, which means that at some phases things are shifting and mutating all over the place. Which makes me rather nervous to sell a book on proposal, because what if the book turns out to be something altogether else than what the publisher thought it was paying for?) But some things have to be settled before a tale can even begin.

My first key world-building invention was the malices, or blight bogles as my book's farmers dub them. They had two sources; one was a meditation, on one of my walks, about the sad lack of Dark Lords in my tales to date, and about the nature of such beings leading to fantasy novel (or trilogy) scenarios of a War To End Wars, which is not how the world in my observation operates; it's really just one damn war after another. And the other was being writer guest at Balticon in June of 2004, when they were having the 17-year cicada outbreak. Big gaudy bewildered insects raining down from the sky like sleet... which triggered, at length, the notion of a fantasy war that constantly hatches anew, just like the real ones. The next key invention was of course the malice-slaying sharing knives, which are a sort of canned human sacrifice, and then the culture that had to exist to support them. The notion of the knives came first; I more or less reasoned backward to many other aspects of the Lakewalkers. And the opening scene presented itself to my mind's eye, and I was off.

The world of Lakewalkers and Farmers is *not* our own—it's not our present, past, or any post-holocaust future, but rather, a separate fantasy creation—but the world of *The Sharing Knife* is in some ways a deliberately American landscape, not only physically but socially: no kings, no lords, no gods, no state religion, bottom-up rather than top-down political structures, all very much under local control.

For its physical details, I mined down to some of the deepest layers of my own experience: the farms, woods, lakes, rivers, animals, plants, insects, people, and weather of my Midwestern Ohio childhood. Like so many other Americans, for me that vanished

landscape is engulfed by various sorts of change or urban sprawl, and is now recoverable only in the mind. My childhood has been paved. The land has gone to the use of other more present lives, and they don't even imagine what went before. This loss of landscape through time is not an American experience only, to be sure, but it's an immensely common one for us.

The first two volumes, *Beguilement* and *Legacy*, were written as one book and cut in two upon publication; the second pair, *Passage* and *Horizon*, were designed as a duology, or sub-duology, following out the consequences of the first parts, but really the tetralogy forms a single story-arc, and should be read in order if possible.

JV: How did you have the idea of the uterine replicator, how do you think women from our time would react if they had the possibility of using it?

LMB: It's not really a new idea in SF; Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* used a version of it back as early as 1932, but, in my dim memory of the book, there it was used, or abused, to enforce a genetic class system. Other, freer social models are possible; my SF universe tries to incorporate as many different possible styles of use as I can think of. It is, by the way, a perfectly physically possible technology, although a lot of biomedical engineering needs to be worked out. Various experiments with animal models are already under way, and I would expect, if it were to be commercially developed, it would be developed for animal husbandry first.

How women would react, I can see in our-world discussions of my own books. Those with a more romantic idea of reproduction tend to be repulsed; those who have or know someone who has undergone the more gruesome possible hazards of a real pregnancy, ranging from miscarriage to serious illness to death to deeply damaged infants, not to mention infertility problems, want to sign up for one today.

Look up these medical terms: pre-eclampsia, eclampsia, ectopic pregnancy, diabetes of pregnancy, placenta praevia. (Wikipedia will do.) Just for starters.

JV: You won the prestigious Hugo award both for SF novels AND for a Fantasy novel. -Do you know how the other authors reacted to that? Do they think that they were deserved?

LMB: I don't know how everyone reacted, but Hugo awards have regularly been won by books and stories from either genre, from far back in Worldcon history. There was nothing unusual about that.

It's not my place to judge if awards are "deserved." A literary award isn't something a writer wins, like a race; instead, an award is bestowed by others, like a gift. There is little that is objective about reading, after all. Awards go to the works the award voters vote for, whether a small jury or a large body of variously selected readers. That's kind of the definition. Quibbles should be taken up with the voters, not the authors.

Just in case some of your readers don't know, the Hugo awards are voted by the fan members of the annual World Science Fiction Convention. <http://www.wsfs.org/> for more information. Both attending and supporting members may vote. The convention generally draws about 4000 - 6000 attendees, though not every attendee chooses to vote for the Hugos, nor to vote in all categories.

JV: -Are you in the same frame of mind when you are writing SF and Fantasy?

LMB: More or less, yes. The techniques and mechanics of the writing are much the same. It's mostly a matter of occupying a particular character's head. Switching viewpoints is almost as much of a jump as switching worlds.

JV: -What is your own perception of difference between the SF readers and the Fantasy readers?

LMB: A lot of readers, including me, cheerfully read both, so there's no difference there. Among those I've talked to who prefer one or the other, some of the SF-only crowd feel a greater sense realism in their SF, which allows them to emotionally engage with it better. Some of the fantasy crowd claim to find more engaging characterizations, more poetic prose, or more sense of the fantastic or, oddly at the same time, history, in their preferred reads.

That said, "sense of wonder," valued by SF readers, and "sense of the numinous," valued by fantasy readers, do seem to me to be two sides of one coin.

JV: What are your plans? What are you working on?

LMB: Right now (October 2009), I'm on break. After finishing *CryoBurn* this summer, I plunged into six weeks of assorted dentistry, which hadn't been in my original schedule. I watched a lot of remedial television while this was going on, via Netflix, a very good DVD rental-by-mail company in the States. The first half of September was taken up with major convention travel. For the past three weeks, I've been repainting my home office for the first time in fourteen years, a major disruption entailing a *huge* amount of sorting. The worst of that is almost over, but there are still trailing chores.

I'm not sure if the office project was pure writing avoidance, or a first sign of returning creative energy, but I rather think the latter, which is a hopeful sign.

There will be lots of promotional chores for *CryoBurn* next fall, but I don't have to think about those yet.

JV: Thank you again.